

***A New Way Forward: How to Improve the Marketing of Conservatism to Today's Young
Americans***

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Benjamin Baker

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Michael Maggiotto

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

May 2019

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2019

Abstract

The political values and the attitudes toward politics of today's young Americans are challenges to groups and organizations who market conservative ideas, principles, and values. Not only are the younger generations moving to the left, but they are also disengaging from the political process altogether. With this knowledge in mind, how are these organizations supposed to respond? How can they use the political attitudes and values of today's young Americans to engage them in a way that encourages them to adopt conservative values? These are the questions that I attempt to answer. In this paper, I analyze the attitudes of today's young Americans toward government and politics and use multiple recent polls to determine how conservative today's young Americans are. I then examine the activities of three current conservative student groups and analyze them through a marketing lens. Finally, I use these findings and the recommendations of Lawless and Fox (2015) to provide my own suggestions for how these groups can improve their marketing of conservatism toward young people.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Maggiotto of the Ball State Political Science Department for being my advisor. His insightful feedback, continuous encouragement, and decades of experience in higher education motivated me to make this thesis the best that it could be.

I want to thank the faculty in the Ball State Department of Political Science for fueling my intellectual curiosity about government and politics. What they have taught me has encouraged me to learn even more.

I want to thank the faculty in the Ball State Department of Journalism for being valuable supplements to my education. While I have discovered that journalism may not be what I want to pursue, what I learned from them will help me greatly as I move forward into the world of politics.

I would like to thank the Ball State Honors College for adding a third dimension to my education and broadening my intellectual perspectives.

I would like to thank the Ball State College Republicans, Turning Point USA, and every candidate for whom I have campaigned for providing me with fun and useful political experience that will only help me as I move forward.

I want to thank every student who has graced me with their presence throughout my four years at Ball State. Of all that I will miss about this university, I will miss the people the most.

And, finally, I want to thank my family for being the greatest cheerleaders I could have asked for. They have gotten me to where I am now.

Process Analysis Statement

The following paper is the culmination of the most intense research journey I have ever embarked on. The path to completion was not straight; rather, it was more like a steadily ascending stock market graph, with peaks and valleys in between. The peaks represent the times where I felt like I was progressing smoothly, while the valleys represent the times where I felt like I was falling behind. But, for the first couple of months of the five that it took to complete this paper, I remained at the starting point. I failed to realize the extent of the research process I had to go through to create a well-structured and well-argued thesis. By the time I realized it, it was already the third month. So, I had to play a considerable amount of catch-up in a short period of time. As a result, I completed the paper at a later date than I would have liked. So, above all else, I learned that, with large projects like this one, it helps to get started early.

But, the process of completing this paper was not one long series of regrets. It was a valuable learning experience that taught me many lessons about not only how to research, but how to research effectively. For the first time in my academic career, I had to put extensive thought into creating a research plan and adhering to that plan. That was a struggle, especially in the early going. At times, creating the research plan felt like I was going up a creek without a paddle. Eventually, however, I found my bearings and, with the guidance of my advisor, created an effective yet flexible research plan that provided me with a strong sense of direction. The plan was not perfect, but it was a serviceable guiding compass for completing this project.

The beginning of my research process consisted of gathering as many sources that contained content related to this paper's topic as possible. From there, I whittled the sources down to the ones that I felt would be the most useful for finding information that I could use to make an effective argument. Next, I spent time diving into those selected sources, searching for

the most pertinent material within them. For each of those sources, I wrote down the key facts and concepts that I would use in the body of this paper. Once I felt that I had gathered enough material, I began typing that material, along with my interpretations of it, into a rough draft. All the while, I was sending the completed parts of the rough draft to my advisor, and he would provide me with constructive criticism and useful feedback that, I knew, would make the argument stronger. Using my advisor's advice and recommendations, I began making edits and adding content that would bolster the paper's argument and structure. When I felt that I had done so to the best degree I could, it became time to finish everything up and turn the paper in.

In my view, the process could not have been more linear. Adhering to the structure of the process was not the primary challenge I faced in carrying out this project. Rather, it was a failure on my part to set aside regular time to comfortably complete each step within a reasonable time frame. I had to complete this process within fewer months than it should have been. This all goes back to the main lesson I learned, which was to start early to allow myself the time to comfortably complete each step in the research process.

Despite that one major regret, I am still proud of what I accomplished. This thesis paper was unlike any other assignment I had ever done before. And, when someone does or tries something new for the first time, the results of that attempt are bound to have imperfections. This thesis, no doubt, has its flaws, and a thesis done by someone who has completed one before would surely surpass mine in terms of quality and structure. That being said, I believe that, over the course of the research process, I put in the requisite amounts of time and effort needed to create a quality first attempt at a massive academic undertaking like this one. My hopes are that readers will enjoy what I have put forth and will take away valuable insights about the marketing of conservative ideas, principles, and values to America's youngest generations.

Introduction

Since the founding of our American republic, political parties and grassroots organizations have sought to capture the feelings, minds, and, most importantly, votes of the American people as data to gauge the attitudes and voting tendencies of Americans. These organizations use these data to improve how they market themselves to the public at large. After all, how could these groups be successful if they did not know the political attitudes of the American electorate? These attitudes are the oars these organizations use to row up the river.

But only recently have the political attitudes of young Americans, which, for this paper, will be those aged 18 to 29, begun to be investigated. Young people began to find a significant political voice in the 1960s, a decade of significant social change and civil unrest. As a result, the 26th Amendment, which gave Americans as young as 18 years old the right to vote, was ratified on July 1, 1971. The passage of this amendment gave young Americans the opportunity to have their say at the ballot box. But, as I will explain, young people are increasingly showing indifference toward our current political system. This is causing them to disengage from the political scene.

This is the challenge for all 21st-century political organizations, as it pertains to re-engaging young Americans. How can political organizations better market their ideas, principles, and values toward young people to make them want to consider entering the world of politics? More specifically, given what we know about young adults' political attitudes, habits, and views, how can conservative organizations and the activists within them reach out to younger generations of Americans—Millennials and Generation Z—more effectively? How can the marketing tactics currently used by conservative groups to market conservative ideas and principles toward young Americans be improved?

I will use a multi-pronged approach to answer these questions. I will begin by using polling data of young Americans to show their leftward shift on many current political issues, which will illustrate the need for conservative groups to market their ideas, principles, and values toward young Americans. Conversely, I also will use polling data to show the level of conservatism among young Americans, in terms of partisanship and policy stances. I will then outline young Americans' attitudes toward politics and the current political system. Next, I will explore the missions and activities of multiple current conservative student organizations, including Turning Point USA, the College Republican National Committee, and Young America's Foundation. Following that, I will define marketing in the academic sense and describe the six-step consumer decision-making model. I will apply these definitions and descriptions to generate theoretical marketing strategies for each of the above organizations and to analyze a young person's decision to (not) join these organizations. Finally, I will answer the central question of how conservative organizations can better market their ideas, principles, and values toward young Americans, given what I will have explained previously.

Why Is Answering This Question Important?

Multiple polls of young Americans' political views suggest that they are moving to the left. A Harvard University poll of 2,037 18- to 29-year-olds taken in the fall of 2017 found that "likely young American voters (cited) preference for Democratic control of Congress, 65 percent to 33 percent." Of this sample, only 14 percent believed that the country was generally headed in the right direction; 67 percent were fearful of the future of the country, compared to 31 percent hopeful. 61 percent were in favor of stricter gun control laws, while 56 percent supported single payer health care. The university's spring 2018 poll found that 70 percent of young Americans

who were likely to vote in last year's midterm elections supported stricter gun control laws, and 58 percent of young Americans supported a ban on assault weapons. Nearly half (47 percent) supported amending the Second Amendment.

Harvard is not the only organization researching young Americans' political stances. A March 2018 study of the generation gap in American politics by the Pew Research Center found that only 12 percent of Millennials—born between 1981 and 1996—were “consistently conservative” or “mostly conservative,” compared to the 57 percent who were “consistently liberal” or “mostly liberal.” Compared to older generations, such as Gen Xers and the Baby Boomers, Millennials are considerably less conservative. 23 percent of Gen Xers were in the “consistently or mostly conservative” categories, as were 32 percent of Boomers. Even still, the percentages of Gen Xers and Boomers who were either “consistently liberal” or “mostly liberal” were greater than those who considered themselves “consistently conservative” or “mostly conservative.” 43 percent of Gen Xers—born between 1965 and 1980—were “consistently liberal” or “mostly liberal”; 39 percent of Baby Boomers—born between 1946 and 1964—fell into the “consistently liberal” or “mostly liberal” categories. So, while younger Americans are more liberal than older generations, the proportions of liberal Gen Xers and Boomers are greater than the proportions of conservatives in these generations. The same Pew study found that a majority of Millennials—59 percent—affiliate with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic, compared to the 32 percent who affiliate with the Republican Party or lean Republican. Millennials prefer a bigger government providing more services; 57 percent feel this way, while 37 percent say they prefer a smaller government providing fewer services.

These findings suggest that marketing conservative ideas to younger Americans might be more difficult than in years past. However, there is hope. The fall 2017 Harvard poll found that,

while roughly two-thirds of young Americans supported a Democratic-controlled Congress, only 34 percent either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, “The Democratic Party cares about people like me.” An even smaller proportion, 21 percent, either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, “The Republican Party cares about people like me.” The March 2018 Pew study found that just 15 percent of Millennials trusted the government about always or most of the time. This is comparable to older age cohorts, who also had percentages in the teens. Americans, but especially younger Americans, are skeptical that the political system works for them. And, when a country’s citizens do not believe that their government is for them, uncertainty and instability arise.

The challenge, then, is to figure out how to use young Americans’ political values and beliefs to showcase the benefits of conservatism. There are some organizations, such as Turning Point USA, the College Republican National Committee, and Young America’s Foundation, that are doing so currently, yet young Americans are still leaning left politically, expressing skepticism about their government, and disengaging from the political scene. Therefore, a new and improved conservative marketing strategy for young people is needed to re-engage them in the world of politics, rebuild their trust in their governmental institutions, and encourage them to adopt conservative ideas, principles, and values for themselves.

I also have a personal interest in answering these questions. During my time as a student at Ball State University, I was involved in the school’s College Republican and Turning Point chapters. I was given many opportunities to interact with other students and discuss conservative principles with them. My work with the school’s Turning Point chapter gave me the bulk of those opportunities. One of the main ways our group shared our message with other students was through tabling, where another member and I would set up a table with posters and buttons that

would encourage people to engage in conversations with us. Yet, a decisive majority walked on by, often giving only a hint of a glance at our table. Even when an opportunity for political discussion presented itself, most students refused to engage. This firsthand experience gave me great concern for the political future of our nation. If most young people refuse to engage in any sort of political conversation, let alone a conservative-focused one, how are they supposed to come to a consensus on the issues facing the country? And, based on the above polls, the majority of young Americans hold left-leaning views on many current political issues, presenting another barrier for conservative activists to reach out toward this critical age cohort and explain to them the benefits of conservative principles. So, on a personal level, these reasons are why answering these questions is important.

What Are Young Americans' Attitudes Toward Politics?

In order to improve their marketing strategies toward young people, conservative organizations must first understand the attitudes of young Americans toward politics in general. The results of multiple studies on this topic paint a grim picture. In their 2015 book *Running from Office: Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics*, Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox observed that, while young people want to be agents of change in their communities, their disdain for politics discourages them from running for office and entering the political world. In the authors' words, young Americans "see politics as pointless and unpleasant, (and) they see political leaders as corrupt and selfish" (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.4). Having grown up in an era of hyperpartisanship and record-low congressional approval ratings—in 2013, 60 percent of voters favored replacing the entire Congress, including their own incumbent (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.14)—young Americans are increasingly feeling no desire to enter the political arena.

John Della Volpe, polling director at the Harvard Institute of Politics, stated, “Young Americans hold the president, Congress, and the federal government in less esteem almost by the day, and the levels of engagement they are having in politics are also on the decline” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.16).

Why do the majority of young Americans view politics in a negative light? There are multiple reasons, according to Lawless and Fox. In the first place, politics is rarely discussed in the home now. Families see politics as “off-putting, negative, and frustrating” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.45). Three-quarters of the students that Lawless and Fox surveyed reported that their parents do not regularly talk about politics, and only one in five said that politics was a regular topic of mealtime conversation (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.47). Four out of five high school and college students have never emailed or shared a political story or current event with their parents (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.49). On the occasions that families do talk politics, “the discussion is often short and negative,” and “typical conversations involve mocking politicians, characterizing the system as corrupt, and perpetuating the idea that government is complicated, messy, and ineffective” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.70).

Family attitudes toward and beliefs about politics are great influencers in shaping young people’s political beliefs. Half a century of research has convincingly shown that “family is the most important influence shaping how young people arrive at their political beliefs” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.45). Jennings and Niemi (1974) note that “children often take on the partisan character of their parents. Especially when compared with other political orientations, the similarity of children’s and parents’ partisanship stands out as particularly strong.” In their survey of 1,852 high school seniors and their parents, 59 percent of the students fell under the same party heading—Democrat, Independent, or Republican—as their parents, with only seven

percent falling into the Republican-Democrat divide (Jennings & Niemi, 1974, p.39). This similarity in partisanship between children and their parents suggests that, in America, “(the) transmission of party preferences from one generation to the next is carried out rather successfully” (Jennings & Niemi, 1974, p.40).

These high child-parent correlations in partisanship are more surprising when one considers that “the process of socialization into partisan orientations is often carried on at a nearly subconscious level” (Jennings & Niemi, 1974, p.61). For most parents, the political socialization of their children is not a paramount concern; it is “a laissez-faire operation” (Jennings & Niemi, 1974, p.62). In a similar vein, many do not care what their children’s partisan orientations are. But, there are limits to this indifference; the parents might be indifferent to their children’s views, so long as they do not become *x*—a Communist, Socialist, etc. And, parents do care about certain aspects of political socialization, such as teaching their children to obey the law and be loyal to their country. When a less consensual topic, such as civil rights, arises, parents may try to influence their children’s views. But, for the most part, parents feel that they do not need to provide much explicit direction; other agents of socialization and their own examples are often sufficient “to guide their children along the desired paths” (Jennings & Niemi, 1974, p.62).

If the majority of political conversations in the home are “short and negative,” as Lawless and Fox state, and if the topics of these conversations do not give politics a positive connotation, it follows that many young people will adopt these negative attitudes toward politics as well. These negative attitudes will discourage them from participating in the political process, let alone run for office. Given that family attitudes toward politics are strong agents of political

socialization, it follows that, if young Americans' attitudes toward politics are to become more positive, then one place to start is the family dinner table.

Another factor contributing toward young Americans' disinterest in the political process is their lack of exposure to politics and current events in their daily lives. While efforts—such as state-mandated government and civics classes in high school and/or college—have been made to increase civic and political engagement in secondary and postsecondary education, “politics is peripheral for most students throughout their high school and college years” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.77). Only one in three college freshmen believe that staying informed on current events is an important goal, and two out of three high school students say that politics is discussed in their classes less than once a week, with one-third saying that it “rarely” or “never” occurs (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.72-75).

College students, on the whole, have had more political exposure. Around seven out of ten had taken at least one government or political science class, and they were twice as likely to consider their classmates politically interested (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.75). Despite these findings, a minority—32 percent—of college students reported having weekly political discussions in the classroom, and just two out of ten considered their classmates to be “very interested in politics and current events” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.76). So, while it may be more likely for college students to have been exposed to government and politics in some form, their interest in these subjects remains low. Their lack of interest is, in part, due to the infrequency or lack of political discussion in their classes.

Not only do high school and college students seldom talk politics in the classroom, but they also rarely discuss politics and current events with their friends. Less than 20 percent of young people reported having even one recent political discussion with their friends, while

roughly 20 percent of college students report frequently discussing politics with their friends (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.80-81). Twenty-seven percent of young people never discuss the subject; “the topic is utterly obscure” for many of them (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p. 81-82). So, it is clear that the lack of political discussion among young people does not stay in the classroom. This carries over to their personal lives. Even with the Internet and social media making it easier than ever to keep abreast of current political events, fewer than half of young Americans visit news websites on a regular basis, and about one-quarter check political websites consistently (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p. 85). If the majority of young people do not make it a priority to stay informed, then what is the point of having conversations about politics and current events?

For most young people, however, avoiding politics is a deliberate act. Lawless and Fox concluded that about 60 percent of young Americans “avoid politics on purpose [...] because what they know about politics (even when it’s often very little) is so unappealing and frustrating that they shut it out of their lives” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.87). As media coverage of politics has increasingly become negative and combative, fewer young people are enjoying following the news; only 29 percent of Millennials “enjoy following the news a lot,” according to national surveys (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.89). These media portrayals of politics as negative and combative lead many young Americans to avoid discussing politics in their day-to-day lives. As Lawless and Fox put it, “Young people don’t want to argue; they’d rather get along and have fun” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.90). Some of the reasons for young people’s avoidance of political discussions with their friends are negative past experiences and the anticipation of the conversations not going well and leading to disagreements (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.90-91). They may want to care about what is going on in government and politics, but, as the authors put it, they “perceive the political system as so broken that they are not interested in following it

closely” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.92). Many are disgusted with the electoral process and view campaigns as “horrible, dumb, and almost impossible to watch” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.93).

The final factor that discourages young people from running for office and engaging in the political process is that their view of leadership does not correspond to their view of political leadership in the current era. Young people want to lead, but they “do not associate the positive leadership traits and skills they possess and value with those they see in politicians” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.107). Not only do the leadership traits young people value not match the traits they see in politicians, but young people fear possessing the traits that politicians exhibit. Politicians are not heroes to most young people. In an Associated Press/MTV poll, 13-24 year-olds were asked to identify their heroes. Fifty percent of them answered that a parent was their hero, with politicians appearing nowhere on the list (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p. 108).

So, why are politicians not heroes to the majority of young Americans? A young American would probably answer, “Because what is there to admire in a politician?” A survey by Lawless and Fox of young people’s attitudes toward politicians found that less than one-quarter considered politicians “interested in wanting to help people,” with even fewer thinking that “politicians stand up for what they believe” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p. 109). They are far more inclined to view current political leaders as “argumentative and dishonest” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.109). The results of the authors’ survey are similar to other surveys on the attitudes of young people toward politicians. A 2014 Harvard University Institute of Politics poll found that roughly 60 percent of 18-29 year-olds believe that “elected officials seem to be motivated by selfish reasons” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.109). Many believe that politicians use their positions to advance their own financial well-being, and they question politicians’ sense of integrity (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.113-114). Many “simply do not believe anything that politicians or

elected officials say” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.114), and they think that the job makes them become self-centered and corrupt. This massive buildup of negative attitudes toward politicians discourages young people from feeling connected to their government and deters them from being motivated to work in politics (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.117).

What, then, are the traits and skills that young people associate with being a good leader? Among other descriptors, young people thought that being “collaborative,” “open-minded,” “willing to compromise,” “good planners,” and “effective problem-solvers” were some of the most important leadership qualities (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.122). However, they have trouble conceiving how they could apply their knowledge and leadership skills to politics. Of those high school and college students who identified themselves as “confident,” 13 percent expressed interest in running for office in the future (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p. 126). Similar percentages came from students who identified themselves as “competitive” and “ambitious.” Herein lies a paradox: many young people believe that they possess the qualities needed to be good leaders, yet they have little interest in becoming political leaders. This is because their views of politicians are so negative that they seem to make any desire to run for office disappear.

The majority of young people that conservative activists attempt to engage have little to no interest in politics whatsoever. Young people rarely talk about government and politics, both at school and at home. When they do discuss politics, the conversations almost always carry a negative tune; the discussions consist of mocking politicians and deriding government as ineffective and corrupt. Many young people neglect to pay attention to current political events, in part because of their negative views about government. When they think about leadership, being a politician rarely comes to mind, because they view political leaders as the opposite of the kind of leader young people want to be. This lack of interest in and negative attitudes toward politics

are significant hurdles that conservative groups must overcome in order to engage young people. But, another factor needs to be considered: how conservative are young Americans?

How Conservative Are Young Americans?

As mentioned earlier in the paper, young Americans, at first glance, are moving to the left. A September 2014 poll by the Pew Research Center, titled “The GOP’s Millennial Problem Runs Deep,” revealed that Millennials (those ages 18-33 at the time) were the most liberal age group. In a survey of over 10,000 Americans, 28 percent of Millennials identified their political values as “mostly liberal,” with 13 percent identifying them as “consistently liberal,” which was the more extreme version of the two. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, just three percent of Millennials identified themselves as “consistently conservative,” while 12 percent said they were “mostly conservative.” Among all Millennials, 44 percent had ideologically mixed views, which represented the largest proportion of those with such views from any generation. This relative liberalism of Millennials leads to a greater likelihood of affiliating with the Democratic Party; about 50 percent of Millennials are Democrats or lean toward the Democratic Party. In contrast, 34 percent affiliate with or lean toward the Republican Party.

Yet, even those 34 percent of Millennials who affiliate with the GOP are less conservative than Republicans of older generations. Thirty-one percent have a mix of political values that are right-of-center, while 51 percent have a mix of conservative and liberal views. Eighteen percent have views that are consistently or mostly liberal. This stands in contrast to all Republicans and Republican leaners; 53 percent have conservative views, and in the Silent and Boomer generations, about two-thirds are consistently or mostly conservative (Kiley & Dimock

2014). There is no such generational divide among Democrats; in all generations, majorities have values that are left-of-center, while most others have a mix of liberal and conservative values.

Younger Republicans are much less conservative than older generations on a number of policy issues. Sixty-four percent of Millennial Republicans agreed with the statement that “homosexuality should be accepted by society,” while 57 percent believed that “immigrants strengthen our country.” Fifty percent said that “business corporations make too much profit,” and 48 percent thought that “stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost” (Kiley & Dimock 2014). In only one instance did a majority of an older generation of Republicans agree with any of these statements, where 51 percent of Gen X Republicans agreed that homosexuality should be accepted by society. Younger Republicans also expressed less skepticism about government; 59 percent agreed with the statement that “government is almost always wasteful and inefficient,” the lowest percentage of any generation of Republicans surveyed. Sixty-eight percent agreed that “government today can’t afford to do much more to help the needy,” which also was the lowest percentage of any generation of Republicans, although by a lower margin. In spite of these generational differences, Millennial Republicans are still more conservative than Democrats of all age groups. They are 19 percent more likely to say that government is wasteful and inefficient and 19 percent less likely to think that business corporations make too much profit (Kiley & Dimock 2014).

Similar generational differences exist among younger and older evangelicals, often considered a politically conservative voting group. A May 2017 Pew poll investigated these differences, finding that younger evangelical Protestants take more liberal positions on social and political issues. Forty-five percent of millennial evangelical Protestants (MEPs) favored same-sex marriage, compared to 23 percent of older evangelical Protestants (OEPs). Fifty-one percent

of MEPs believed that homosexuality should be accepted by society, while 32 percent of OEPs agreed with the statement. Twenty-seven percent of MEPs thought that America's growing immigrant population was a change for the better, with only 13 percent of OEPs saying the same. Forty-one percent of MEPs preferred a bigger government with more services to the poor and needy, while 27 percent of OEPs thought the same thing. Fifty-five percent of MEPs thought that stricter environmental laws were worth the cost, with 43 percent of OEPs thinking so. And, 45 percent of MEPs believed that government aid did more good than harm, with 36 percent of OEPs believing so (Diamant & Alper 2017).

In terms of ideological and party identification, MEPs were less likely than OEPs to self-identify as conservative, 42 to 58 percent, respectively. They were slightly more likely, however, to identify as moderate, 34 to 25 percent. Yet, these generation differences in ideological identification did not translate to vast differences in party identification. A majority—51 percent—of MEPs identified as Republican, compared to 57 percent of OEPs. There was barely any difference between those who identified as Democrats; 30 percent of MEPs did, while 28 percent of OEPs did. Similar proportions within each group thought that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases—65 percent of MEPs versus 63 percent of OEPs (Diamant & Alper 2017).

Like Millennial Republicans, Millennial evangelical Protestants are more conservative than their generation as a whole. The most significant differences stem from their opinions on abortion, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage. Sixty-five percent of MEPs believe that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases, while only 36 percent of Millennials agree with that statement. Forty-nine percent of MEPs oppose same-sex marriage, compared to 20 percent of Millennials. MEPs were 26 percent more likely to say that homosexuality should be

discouraged by society. While 51 percent of MEPs are or lean Republican, only 27 percent of their Millennial counterparts do. And, 42 percent of MEPs self-identify as conservative, while 22 percent of Millennials as a whole do so (Diamant & Alper 2017).

Based on these two studies, we see a pattern beginning to emerge. Today's young conservatives and evangelicals are, indeed, more liberal than conservatives and evangelicals of older generations. The Millennials' shift toward liberalism has not left those on the right unscathed. However, when compared to Millennials as a whole, Millennial conservatives and evangelicals are still much more to the right. Therefore, there is certainly an opportunity for conservative organizations to make inroads with these groups.

Further, young Americans might not be as progressive as they are commonly viewed. In her August 2017 article "Young Americans Are Actually Not Becoming More Progressive," Jean M. Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, pointed out that 37 percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, which was similar to the amount who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 (Twenge 2017). Among white young adults, Trump won by 48 percent to 43 percent. Young Americans in iGen (those born between 1995 and 2012), according to Twenge, are more conservative than is often assumed. In her analysis of the University of Michigan's yearly Monitoring the Future survey, Twenge found that the percentage of high school seniors identifying as conservative rose from 23 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2015, which is more conservative than teenagers in the era of Ronald Reagan (Twenge 2017). Twenge attributed this rise in conservatism to those in iGen being "laser-focused on their economic prospects." Those in iGen are more likely to support abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and legalizing marijuana, in addition to being less likely to

support the death penalty. However, they are also less likely to back gun control, nationalized health care, and government environmental regulation (Twenge 2017).

How can these contradictions be? According to Twenge, those in iGen are more libertarian than their elders; growing up in an individualistic culture, libertarianism was the closest political match. While liberals tend to be individualistic on equal rights issues such as same-sex marriage, they tend to be collectivistic about social programs. In contrast, conservatives are more individualistic about social programs and collectivistic on equal rights issues. But, libertarians are individualistic about both (Twenge 2017). This has led to young Americans valuing authenticity in their political candidates, and more and more of them identifying as independents.

This increase in young people's self-identification as political independents has been noticed by Kristen Soltis Anderson, a co-founder of the polling organization Echelon Insights and author of *The Selfie Vote: Where Millennials Are Leading America (And How Republicans Can Keep Up)*. In her December 2017 column, "Is Trump Driving Young Republicans Out of the Party?" Anderson argues that young voters are becoming more and more politically independent, especially young Republicans. Those remaining young Republicans are highly concentrated partisans. Many young people who may have once self-identified as Republican have chosen to stay independent. In the Fall 2017 Harvard Institute of Politics poll of Americans under 30, the largest category of political affiliation was independent, with a 39 percent share. Thirty-eight percent self-identified as Democrats, while only 22 percent identified themselves as Republicans.

To explain this increase in independent political affiliation among young Americans, Anderson points to a November 2017 study by NBC, which explained that many young voters see no need to identify themselves with a particular party. They also are unsure if either party

cares about them, which is consistent with the results of the fall 2017 Harvard poll. Yet, in spite of young Americans' increased movement toward the political middle and their libertarianism, many are still voting like Democrats.

This is exemplified in the 2017 Virginia governor's race. In that election, Democratic candidate Ralph Northam defeated Republican candidate Ed Gillespie by 54 to 45 percent. However, young voters had a turnout rate of 34 percent, according to an analysis of exit polling by a group at the Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University. The young voter turnout rate for this gubernatorial election was up from 26 percent in the 2013 Virginia governor race, and it was double the turnout for the 2009 election. Among those young voters who turned out in 2017, 69 percent voted for Northam, while 30 percent voted for Gillespie. In precincts that were adjacent to college campuses, turnout was up eight points from 2013, and Northam won 72 percent of the vote, according to data from the non-partisan Virginia Public Access Project (Schneider 2017). The VPAP analysis also found that, in precincts adjacent to colleges but where voters age 40 and younger make up more than 60 percent of the population, turnout was up seven points, and Northam won more than 81 percent of the vote (Schneider 2017).

So, if we go back to the question posed, "How conservative are young Americans?" the answer appears to be a mixed bag. On the one hand, some suggest that young Americans, especially the generation after Millennials, are more conservative than commonly perceived. This is due to their upbringing in an individualistic modern society, which has led them to adopt individualistic and libertarian political beliefs. And, while today's young conservatives and evangelicals appear to be more liberal than their older counterparts, they are still more conservative on multiple policy issues than the younger generations as a whole. Conservative organizations focused on reaching out to young people should be encouraged by these findings.

But, on the other hand, in spite of these findings, young people are voting more Democratic. They also are more likely than older generations to leave the Republican Party; according to a May 2017 Pew Study, 23 percent of those under 30 who initially identified as Republicans or leaned Republican in December 2015 shifted to the Democratic Party by March 2017 (Pew Research Center 2017). This was 13 percent more than any other age group studied. Many are also shedding partisan and ideological labels in favor of becoming politically independent, which could be due to their lack of socialization into the world of politics by their parents. So, if conservative organizations hope to retain young people's interest, they must take these findings into account and adjust their marketing strategies accordingly.

This brings the inquiry to its next questions: what are some of the leading organizations that are marketing conservatism to young people, and what strategies are they using to accomplish their goals?

What Conservative Organizations Are Marketing Toward Young People?

Multiple organizations exist to expose young Americans to conservative principles. Depending on how one defines the term "conservative," all sorts of organizations could be considered as such. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus on three prominent conservative student organizations: Turning Point USA, the College Republican National Committee (CRNC), and Young America's Foundation (YAF). I will look at each group's mission and goals individually, and I will then attempt to compose a set of common goals and activities that applies to all of the groups. I will now outline the mission, goals, and activities of the most recently established conservative student organization: Turning Point USA.

Turning Point USA

Founded on June 5, 2012 by Charlie Kirk, Turning Point USA's mission, according to the organization's website, is to "identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government" (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>). The goal of the organization's mission is to "build the most organized, active, and powerful conservative grassroots activist network on college campuses across the country" (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>). With a presence on over 1300 college and high school campuses, Turning Point USA brands itself as "the largest and fastest growing youth organization in America" (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>).

The main way in which Turning Point USA strives to achieve its mission is through its National Field Program. The seven aims of the National Field Program are the following:

- 1) "Launch, organize, and support student groups that exist to educate students about the benefits of limited government, capitalism, and freedom."
- 2) "Build and maintain the largest national database of students who believe in capitalism and free markets."
- 3) "Unite like-minded campus organizations in an effort to increase impact and activism collaboration."
- 4) "Educate students about the importance of free market values through well-planned, effective activism initiatives."
- 5) "Re-brand free market values on college campuses through student-driven messaging efforts and face-to-face conversations."
- 6) "Effectively push back against intolerance and bias against conservatives in higher education."

- 7) “Empower and train students to join the movement and become activists on their campuses and within their communities” (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>).

Turning Point USA also markets its ideas through what the organization calls “innovative grassroots messaging.” This messaging is primarily through posters and buttons that seek to capture students’ attention and to serve as starting points for face-to-face conversations. Some of the slogans on the posters that Turning Point USA uses include “Big Government Pollutes,” “Fossil Fuels Save Lives,” “Taxation Is Theft,” “Commies Aren’t Cool,” and “Socialism: Ideas So Good That They Have to Be Mandatory.” The organization estimates that, through these grassroots messaging techniques, it has been able to identify more than 150,000 conservative activists in a single school year and engage in over 500,000 face-to-face conversations with college students each semester (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>). For those students who are actively involved, the organization offers activism supplies, leadership training, and field staff support.

In addition to providing posters and buttons, Turning Point USA also writes educational booklets that “provide readers with facts, figures, and talking points that can be used to promote and explain important issues facing the country” (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>). Some of these booklets are titled *Capitalism Cures*, *The Healthcare Games*, *Game of Loans*, *If the Founders Had Twitter*, and *5 Reasons Censorship Should Offend You*. The organization also hosts multiple activist training conferences “that are designed to train and equip our best student leaders, provide one-of-a-kind networking opportunities, and inspire and empower students to be fearless in their fight for our values” (<https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>). These conferences include the Young Women’s Leadership Summit, the Young Latino Leadership Summit, the

High School Activist Conference, and the Winter in West Palm Beach Activist Retreat. Turning Point USA is also active on social media, with accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, and Tumblr.

College Republican National Committee (CRNC)

The College Republican National Committee (CRNC) has existed for over 125 years. The organization's first chapter was founded as the American Republican College League in 1892 at the University of Michigan. By the mid-1920s, it was operating directly under the Republican National Committee as the Associated University Republican Clubs. In 1935, the College Republicans were merged into the newly created Young Republican National Federation, which brought both college students and young professionals under the organization's umbrella. This organizational arrangement continued until 1965, when the CRNC was founded (<http://www.crncc.org/about/history/>).

Currently, the CRNC is made up of 50 state federations and the District of Columbia, in addition to more than 1800 active College Republican chapters and over 250,000 members. The CRNC has a nationally elected chairman and officers who lead the organization, as well as support staff operating out of the organization's national headquarters in Washington, D.C. Each of the state federations has its own chairman and leadership committee who work directly with the national leadership (<http://www.crncc.org/about/history/>). The CRNC brands itself as "the nationally elected voice for young conservatives across the country," and it "drives and defines the debate for College Republicans and bring youth-oriented issues to the forefront of the political discourse" (<http://www.crncc.org/about/history/>). As the "unions of the right," the CRNC

lays claim to being “the fastest growing sector of Republican Party activists”

(<http://www.crnc.org/about/history/>).

Similar to Turning Point USA, the CRNC “recruits, trains, mobilizes, and engages college-aged students in all 50 states and Washington, D.C to [...] advocate for conservative ideals” (<http://www.crnc.org/about/history/>). However, unlike the first group, the CRNC also mobilizes college students to win elections for Republican candidates. Whereas Turning Point USA is a non-partisan—although conservative—organization, students involved in the CRNC “help elect Republican candidates, support the Republican agenda, and become the future leaders of the conservative movement” (<http://www.crnc.org/about/history/>). They engage in standard political campaigning activities, such as distributing campaign literature, canvassing neighborhoods, placing lawn signs, and calling voters. Through these activities, the CRNC hopes “to build and foster lifelong allegiance with the party and the conservative movement for college students” (<http://www.crnc.org/about/history/>). Like Turning Point USA, the CRNC is also active on social media, with accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Young America’s Foundation (YAF)

Young America’s Foundation (YAF) has a lifespan in between the two previously mentioned organizations. YAF began at Vanderbilt University in 1969 as University Information Services, which was established by a group of students “to provide students with conservative ideas that were missing in their educations” (<https://www.yaf.org/about/history/>). Two years later, UIS became a national organization and was renamed Young America’s Foundation. The newly expanded organization retained the goal of bringing conservative speakers to campuses, and it launched a nationwide effort “to share the Conservative Movement’s greatest minds and

voices with student audiences to provide intellectual balance”

(<https://www.yaf.org/about/history/>).

YAF is similar to Turning Point USA in that it is primarily a grassroots activist student organization. It distributes various materials, such as stickers, posters, and buttons, to spread conservative ideas around campuses. Many of these materials advocate for a common theme of freedom; for example, the Patriot Pack, the starter kit of YAF materials, includes stickers that say “I Support Free Speech” and “Freedom Not Socialism” and buttons that say “Freedom” on them. The organization also gives campus chapters the opportunity to purchase a “Free Speech Box,” which, among other items, includes Free Speech posters, stickers, and buttons. Copies of the United States Constitution also are provided in both packages (<https://students.yaf.org/campus-activism/>). YAF, like Turning Point USA, also hosts multiple conferences, such as the annual National Conservative Student Conference and the National High School Leadership Conference.

General Student Conservative Outreach Principles

From this cursory look at the missions, goals, and activities of each of these three conservative student organizations, a general set of principles of outreach begins to emerge. However, these three organizations appear to be divided into two camps, with partisanship being the dividing factor. In one camp are the ideologically-based organizations, Turning Point USA and Young America’s Foundation, and in the other camp is the organization rooted in political partisanship, the College Republican National Committee. The College Republican National Committee’s mission, activities, and goals are all centered on maintaining the Republican Party’s status as one of the two major American political parties. Organizing student efforts to assist

Republican candidates in winning their elections at all levels of government is the way that the CRNC does this. Distributing literature, placing signs in people's yards, conducting phone banks, and knocking on doors in neighborhoods are activities that are staples of any political campaign, and these activities make the CRNC unique in its efforts to attract students to the conservative movement, more specifically the Republican Party. Not only does it want to attract students to the party, but it also wants to keep them there, as evidenced by the CRNC's goal "to build and foster lifelong allegiance with the party and the conservative movement for college students" (<http://www.crn.org/about/history/>). Certainly, Turning Point USA and YAF also want to attract students to conservatism, but they do not explicitly desire to attract students to any particular political party. All of the three organizations aim to promote a sense of conservative solidarity, but, in one camp, the solidarity is based in conservative ideology, while, in the other, the solidarity is based in conservative partisanship. This difference explains the unique outreach activities of the College Republican National Committee.

Turning Point USA and Young America's Foundation, on the other hand, have activities that, in my view, are based on encouraging students to adopt their ideas, principles, and values for themselves. Bringing in conservative speakers, providing material items, and hosting activism and leadership conferences are the ways that these two organizations use to accomplish this goals. Giving students the opportunity to purchase buttons, posters, shirts, and stickers that have conservative slogans and images on them allows those students to indicate that they have adopted those ideas, values, and principles for themselves. They are also tools of recruitment; if a student who believes in conservative ideas sees someone with a "Taxation Is Theft" button on their backpack, it may materially incentivize that student to join these particular organizations because they desire to have an item that articulates their conservative beliefs. For those who

desire to be leaders in these organizations, conferences and workshops are available for them to get the tools they need to be effective leaders. All of these activities are rooted in providing an outlet of ideologically conservative solidarity in a place, the campus, where it is assumed that there is no such outlet. Whether that is indeed the case is a separate question, and assuming that colleges and universities, unless forced to by these organizations, would naturally neglect to provide any ideologically conservative outlet is a major assumption that these organizations are based on. In either case, the activities of Turning Point USA and Young America's Foundation are designed to provide that outlet, whether one already exists or not.

So, in the final analysis, each of these three conservative student organizations aims to provide a sense of solidarity. For the College Republican National Committee, this sense of solidarity is rooted in partisanship and partisan campaign activities. For Turning Point USA and Young America's Foundation, this sense of solidarity is rooted in ideology and materials and events that aim to spread that ideology in the area the organization is based in. While each of the three organizations aims to attract students toward conservatism, they prepare students to advocate for conservatism in different ways. The CRNC equips students to advocate for conservatism by encouraging people in their communities to vote for conservative—in this case, Republican—candidates. Student advocates are, in essence, advocating for other conservative advocates—Republican elected officials. Turning Point USA and Young America's Foundation, on the other hand, equip students to advocate for conservatism in the arena of ideological debate through their debate-provoking items and the conferences that they host. All of the organizations have political advocacy as their goal, but their purposes for that advocacy differ. These different purposes generate different marketing strategies between each of these organizations. It would be

useful, however, to consider these organizations' activities through a more academic marketing lens.

What Is Marketing?

Up to this point, I have made repeated references to marketing and marketing strategies, but I have yet to define what “marketing” means. I will now provide a textbook definition of marketing and its components, and I will then consider how the activities of Turning Point USA, the CRNC, and YAF fit into this definition.

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association 2013). A closer look at this definition reveals that marketing consists of four primary activities: creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging. To understand what each of these activities mean, here are brief descriptions of each.

- 1) **Creating**—the process of collaborating with suppliers and customers to create offerings that have value.
- 2) **Communicating**—describing those offerings and listening to customer feedback.
- 3) **Delivering**—getting those offerings to the consumer in a way that optimizes value.
- 4) **Exchanging**—trading value for those offerings (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 1.1, Defining Marketing section, para. 1).

The traditional view of the components of marketing can also be described in a set of four principles, called the four Ps:

- 1) **Product**—goods and services (creating offerings).

- 2) **Promotion**—communication.
- 3) **Place**—getting the product to a point at which the customer can purchase it (delivering).
- 4) **Price**—the monetary amount charged for the product (exchanging) (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 1.1, Defining Marketing section, para. 2).

Value, “the benefits buyers receive that meet their needs,” is at the center of every marketing activity (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 1.1, Value section, para. 1-2). But, while the offering is created by the company, customers determine the offering’s value. Thus, the value of a product or service varies from person to person. The goal of marketers is to ensure that their offering produces a net positive in the customer’s personal value equation, which is

Value=Benefits Received – [Price + Hassle] (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 1.1, Value section, para. 3). In this equation, *hassle* is “the time and effort the customer puts into the shopping process” (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 1.1, Value section, para. 4). Since different consumers put different amounts of time and effort into shopping, and since each consumer judges the benefits of a product differently, value is a personal measure.

In order to market their offerings effectively, companies will produce marketing plans, which determine how the company will implement the four components of marketing. Marketing plans combine a company’s mission statement and corporate strategy with an understanding of the market the company is in (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 1.4, The Marketing Plan section, para. 1). Companies will develop value propositions that outline the benefits of its product or service to buyers. When developing value propositions, companies will identify the target markets, or groups of customers, which they want to reach (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 2.1, “What Is a Value Proposition?” section, paras. 1&4). They will then create strategies that support their value proposition.

This summary of marketing and marketing plans raises a number of pertinent questions: How do these marketing concepts apply to the organizations discussed in this paper? What are the offerings that these organizations market to young people? Do these organizations create profitable exchanges for their target market—young people? Most importantly, do young people think that these organizations’ offerings will benefit them? If the answer to the last question is “no,” then changes in these organizations’ marketing strategies may be in order. Before these questions can be sufficiently answered, however, it would be useful to explain the factors that influence consumers’ behavior.

How Do People Make Buying Decisions?

In order to understand how young people arrive at the decision to (not) join or associate with these conservative student organizations, we must first understand the process by which people make decisions to (not) buy products or services—the offerings that companies provide. In *Principles of Marketing* (2015), the author(s) discuss four different types of factors that influence consumers’ buying behavior: 1) Situational Factors; 2) Personal Factors; 3) Psychological Factors; and 4) Societal Factors. Situational factors include the social situation, the time of day or year, the reason for the purchase, and the person’s mood. Personal factors include a person’s personality and self-concept, their gender, age, and stage of life, and their lifestyle. Psychological factors include a person’s motivation (their inward drive to get what they need); their perception (how they interpret the world around them and make sense of it in their brain); their learning (how they change their consumption habits after gaining information or experience); and their attitudes (how they feel about certain products, services, or companies).

Societal factors include the culture and/or subculture one is in, social class, reference groups, opinion leaders, and the family.

Depending on the offering in question, certain factors may be more prominent in the consumer's mind than others. However, there is another factor that consumers must consider when deciding on buying a product or service, and this factor is also dependent on the particular offering. Different products merit different levels of involvement, or how personally important or interested one is in consuming a product and how much information one needs to make a decision (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 3.2, para. 1). Some buying decisions are low-involvement; these decisions are made about buying products that either are inexpensive or are low risks to the buyer if they fail. In contrast, other buying decisions are high-involvement; these decisions are made about buying products, such as cars, houses, and insurance policies, which are more costly and carry more risks if they fail (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 3.2, paras. 4&5). Regardless of the level of involvement, however, consumers go through the same process when deciding to buy a product or service.

According to this particular text (2015), the process consists of six steps, which are listed and described below:

- 1) **Need Recognition:** As the name suggests, in this stage, consumers recognize their need for a product or service valuable to them.
- 2) **Search for Information:** If the product or service requires a higher level of involvement, the consumer will gather information on different alternatives. They may visit stores, search the Internet, or talk to friends and family to get this information.
- 3) **Product Evaluation:** In this stage, consumers will use predetermined evaluative criteria (price, color, size, etc.) to determine how well different alternatives meet those criteria.

- 4) **Product Choice and Purchase:** After evaluating the different alternatives, the consumer will choose to purchase a product or service. They may also consider where and how to purchase it and on what terms.
- 5) **Post-purchase Use and Evaluation:** The consumer will determine whether the product or service met their expectations.
- 6) **Disposal of the Product:** The consumer will discontinue use of the product or service (*Principles of Marketing*, 2015, Chapter 3.1).

In summary, marketing consists of creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging the value of a product or service (an offering). Consumers will purchase an offering if they believe that its benefits to them outweigh the combination of its price and hassle. Depending on the offering's price and level of risk, a decision to purchase an offering can be low-involvement or high-involvement. There also are situational, personal, psychological, and societal factors that go into a consumer's buying decision. Now, given all of these marketing concepts, it is time to connect them to the current situation. How do these concepts apply to the activities and offerings of the previously discussed student organizations?

The Marketing Concepts, Applied

It is now time to take what we have learned about marketing and consumers' buying behavior and connect it to what we have learned about Turning Point USA, the College Republican National Committee, and Young America's Foundation. In this section, I will discuss the offerings of each organization and how each organization markets the value of their

offerings. I also will provide a possible explanation for young people's (dis)engagement with these organizations, based on the findings about consumers' buying behavior.

The primary offering of Turning Point USA is, according to the organization's mission statement, a set of three principles: fiscal responsibility, free markets, and limited government (<https://www.tpusa.com>). Its offering is not a tangible product, but a set of governmental concepts and ideas that, in the hope of the organization, students will adopt for themselves. However, the organization often communicates and delivers the value of those principles via tangible items, such as the buttons, posters, and stickers mentioned earlier. The buttons, posters, and stickers are material offerings that are used to market an intangible offering. Put another way, these items serve as ways for Turning Point USA to connect the products to the principles. The desire of the organization is to create in the students' minds a positive association between the products and the principles. In this way, at least in theory, students will, based on that positive association, come to adopt those marketed principles for themselves.

The primary offering of the College Republican National Committee is, like Turning Point USA, conservative ideas and principles. Another offering is electoral victories for Republican candidates at all levels of government. A third offering is, in the words of the organization, "lifelong allegiance with the (Republican) Party" (<http://www.crnc.org/about/history/>). So, like Turning Point USA, the CRNC markets intangible offerings to students; ideas, principles, and party loyalty are all intangible concepts. However, the CRNC markets the value of its offerings in a different manner than Turning Point USA. While the CRNC also gives out tangible merchandise, the primary method of promotion is through campaigning activities, such as distributing campaign literature, knocking doors in neighborhoods, placing signs in people's yards, and making phone calls to voters. In a sense,

then, the CRNC markets its offerings more so by “doing” than by “selling” tangible products, such as the buttons, posters, and stickers that Turning Point USA offers. By engaging students in partisan political activities, the CRNC hopes that students will come to develop an allegiance to and appreciation for the Republican Party.

The main offering of Young America’s Foundation is similar to that of the previous two organizations. YAF’s offering is a set of four governmental ideas: “individual freedom, a strong national defense, free enterprise, and traditional values” (<https://www.yaf.org/about/>). The organization’s methods of promoting the value of those ideas are closer to the methods of Turning Point USA than those of the CRNC. YAF states on its website, “We accomplish our mission by providing essential conferences, seminars, educational materials, internships, and speakers to young people across the country” (<https://www.yaf.org/about/>). What YAF provides to accomplish its mission is similar to what Turning Point USA provides to accomplish its mission. Although I focused on the material products Turning Point USA offers, the organization, like YAF, also hosts conferences, seminars, and campus speakers, in addition to internships. The goal, then, for YAF appears to be the same goal for Turning Point USA: by creating a positive association between the events it hosts, the products it provides, and the ideas it promotes, students will, from that positive association, come to adopt for themselves the principles that YAF advocates for.

In summary, the principal offering of each of these three organizations is a set of governmental ideas and principles. The principles that are advocated by Turning Point USA and Young America’s Foundation are more specific than those advocated by the College Republican National Committee. The CRNC advocates for “conservative ideals,” while the other two groups focus on specific principles, such as free markets, limited government, and traditional values. All

three organizations provide some sort of material offering that, they hope, will generate positive attitudes toward those principles among students. The CRNC, however, is unique in its efforts to give students experience in campaign politics that will generate an internal desire to remain with the Republican Party for life. This goes back to the earlier point that, while all three organizations engage in political advocacy, the purposes of that advocacy differ.

So, there is an overview of the offerings that each of these organizations market. We have, however, only discussed one side of the marketing exchange. In any form of exchange, there are givers—the organizations described above—and there are receivers—the students whom these organizations are trying to reach out to. Up to this point in this section, only the givers and the offerings they give have been discussed. Now, it is time to discuss the receivers’, or the students’, side of the exchange. What follows is my interpretation of a student’s decision to engage with these organizations, based on each of the six stages of the consumer’s decision-making process that are outlined in the previous section.

The Consumer Decision-Making Process, Applied

In this section, I will interpret the previously defined six-step consumer decision-making process in the context of student engagement with these political organizations. Before I do, however, it should be noted that I am equating a student’s decision to (not) engage with these organizations with a consumer deciding to (not) buy a product or service. While the two situations are not completely equal, it is the equation I am making in order to interpret this model for this scenario. Having made that admission, let us turn to the first step in the consumer decision-making process, which is need recognition. I will interpret each of the six steps individually.

In the first stage of the consumer decision-making model, the consumer recognizes within themselves a need for a product or service. In the context of this scenario, this would equate to a young person deciding that he or she is in need of a group or organization where they can feel comfortable expressing their political beliefs. Perhaps the person has the desire to discuss politics and current affairs, but they do not belong to a group of people who discusses those topics. Or, perhaps the person already has friends and acquaintances who they can discuss these topics with, but they may feel like they are being mocked for their particular set of beliefs. These are just a couple of many possible reasons for why one may recognize a need to join a student political organization, including the ones discussed previously. Recognizing that need, however, is only the first step, because the person has not yet determined which organization, if any, that they are going to join.

The second stage, the search for product information, is the first step that our hypothetical young person takes to determine which organization that they are going to join. Likely, that young person will use the methods discussed in the section covering the consumer decision-making model to find information about political organizations that focus on student outreach. He or she may ask their friends if they know about any political student organizations, or they might go online and search for those organizations. As they get further along in their search, the young person will likely begin to find ones that share their particular political beliefs and values. This suggests that the young person has already begun to evaluate the groups, which is the third step in the process. The young person has started to weed out the organizations that, upon close research, do not share their set of political beliefs and values. It is here that they begin to narrow down their list of possible organizations to the ones that they may seriously consider joining.

There are, however, other possible evaluative criteria that our young person may use. Certainly, the political principles and values advocated by the organization are one. But, the young person might also consider the culture of the organization. Are relations between those already involved in the group friendly or hostile, and does the organization seem willing to accept new members? The young person might also see if the organization hosts leadership conferences and/or campus speakers. They might also see if there are any available leadership opportunities within their campus chapter, provided, of course, that there is one. If there is no chapter of an organization on the young person's particular campus, then their chances of joining that one decrease considerably, unless there is a chapter on a nearby campus. Once the young person considers each of the organizations in the framework of their evaluative criteria, they will then decide (not) to join a political campus organization, equivalent to the fourth step in the process.

After our young person has been in that organization for a while, they will start to determine whether their involvement has met their expectations. This is equivalent to the fifth step in the model. The young person will re-evaluate the organization based on their already-established evaluative criteria, but they will now base it on how their experience within the organization has fit into those criteria. If the young person decides that their experience has fit into those criteria well, then they likely will continue to be involved with the organization. But, if they decide that their experience has not fit into those criteria, then they may consider either reducing their involvement or quitting the organization altogether. Put another way, the young person has decided that the price and hassle involved in remaining with the organization exceeds the benefits they have received. This reduces the organization's value to them, and it increases

the likelihood that they will leave (dispose of) the organization, which is the final step in the process.

This is just one of many possible series of events that could occur based on this model. Some students may not even reach the first step, because they do not see the need for this kind of organization. There are many plausible reasons for this. Perhaps the student, in addition to studying full-time, works a full-time job to pay for their education, and thus, they have no free time to join any extracurricular organizations. Or, the student may want to join a political organization, but they are on their way to a class and cannot stop to talk with an organizational representative. So, some of the reasons are situational. Others, however, could be related to young people's attitudes toward government and politics, which were discussed earlier. Many young people have little to no interest in the political system, so they are not likely to seek out joining a political organization at their school. Others may have interest, but hold such negative opinions about the political process that they refuse to even consider joining one of these organizations, even though they may want to.

Another possible scenario is that the student recognizes their need to join a political organization, goes through a search for information, and evaluates their options, but then decides not to join one. The student gets halfway through the process and then decides to stop for the reasons listed above or others. The point is that there are many other possible ways for a student to go through this six-step decision-making model other than the one I listed out in detail. Now that we have gone through various possible ways for students to go through this model in the scenario of deciding (not) to join a political organization, it is time to list some suggestions for conservative student organizations to improve their marketing of the principles they stand for.

These suggestions will be based on suggestions made by Lawless and Fox (2015) and on the policy stances and political attitudes of today's young Americans.

Areas of Improvement in Marketing Conservatism to Young Americans

In order for conservative student organizations to improve their marketing strategies to younger generations of Americans, before anything else, these organizations must motivate them to become interested in the political process. As shown in an earlier section, the majority of young Americans have little to no interest in government and politics. This is, in large part, due to the seemingly constant stream of negative opinions and attitudes that the media, their friends, and their families hold toward the political arena. In the eyes of many young Americans, it is not worth dealing with this overwhelming negativity that is the price for being interested in political happenings. Thus, many of them are turned off at the idea of entering the political fray. The motivation that these conservative student organizations must provide must be primarily concerned with generating positive attitudes within young people toward the political process. But, is this even possible? Are there any initiatives that these organizations, or, for that matter, anyone concerned about the future of our American republic can adopt in order to generate these positive attitudes?

Lawless and Fox (2015) provide five recommendations in *Running from Office* that could give these organizations some clues. While these recommendations are primarily focused on piquing young people's interest in running for political office, which is not a primary goal of any of the three discussed organizations, they can be adapted to fit each of these organizations' goals. I will explain each of Lawless and Fox's recommendations in more detail, and I will then attempt to adjust these recommendations to fit the missions of these organizations.

Recommendation Number One: The YouLead Initiative

This recommendation by Lawless and Fox, in its essence, involves creating a national campaign that would urge young people to consider running for office. The program would consist of three elements. First, it would aim to convince young people, through the usage of digital devices and social media, that running is a worthwhile, appealing, and effective way to serve their communities (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.146). Second, the program would present the possibility of a different kind of politics by using local elected officials as examples of regular men and women who want to improve their communities. These local elected officials would serve as models for young people to run and lead (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.147-148). Third, the program would identify high school and college students who exhibit leadership success and encourage them to run. Regional and state program coordinators would be used to identify these students, and they would be invited to conferences to teach them how to “channel their leadership capabilities into electoral politics” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.148-149).

Recommendation Number Two: PlayStation for Politics

This recommendation seeks to take advantage of young people’s propensity for playing video games. In Lawless and Fox’s survey of high school and college students, roughly two-thirds reported playing video games daily, and more than one in five played for at least two hours a day (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.149). This creates another opportunity for political engagement with young people: creating video games “that would immerse young people in the world of politics” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.150). For instance, one possible video game idea would consist of the player taking on the role of a political candidate. The object of the game would be

for the player's candidate to get on the ballot, win the primary, and win the general election. Along the way, the player would have to make decisions that could affect the game's outcome, such as deciding when to file their candidacy or withstanding temptations like accepting gifts from donors (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.150). Another game would involve players becoming elected officials who must make and enact new laws (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.151).

Recommendation Number Three: Make Political Engagement Fundamental to the College Experience

The aim of this recommendation is to “link political aptitude to the college application process” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.153). This would be done by making colleges and universities require their applicants to ensure that they are on track to become engaged citizens who know something about current political events. One solution to meet this requirement could be to make a political or current events test part of either an existing or new entrance exam. It could be done by adding another section to the SAT or ACT, or by creating an entirely new test (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.153-154). It might also involve mounting a concerted effort on the part of those involved in college admissions to “emphasize the merits of being an informed citizen,” which would send a message to young people that they are expected to know something about politics (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.155).

Recommendation Number Four: Increase College Women's Political Ambition

This fourth recommendation by Lawless and Fox involves inspiring more college women to consider running for office. In their study, the authors found that college men were more than twice as likely to be “definitely interested” in running (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.156). College

women, on the other hand, were 60 percent more likely to say that they would never run. Further, women reported less political discussion in their lives and were less likely to receive the suggestion to run for office (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.156-157). Thus, the authors suggest that existing women's organizations, both on campuses and nationally, expand their reach to encourage more women to consider running someday (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.158).

Recommendation Number Five: Enter the World of the App

The final recommendation that Lawless and Fox make is to create a mobile app that allows young people to “identify political offices and (inform) them about how to run for them” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.161). Creating this app would utilize young people's propensity for mobile phone usage. According to the authors, about three-quarters of high school juniors and seniors and more than 90 percent of college students carry mobile devices with Internet access. And, they use these devices all the time: according to statistics from the *Mobile Youth Survey* provided in Lawless and Fox's book, 81 percent of people under the age of 25 sleep with their phone next to them on the bed; 74 percent report reaching for their smartphones as the first thing they do when they wake up; and 97 percent of teenagers regularly use smartphones in the bathroom to check messages (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.160-161). The proposed app would provide a definition of each office, its core responsibilities, and information about the logistics and rules required to run. It could also be used in high school and college curricula “to show students how to get involved in their communities and learn about the many electoral opportunities they could pursue” (Lawless & Fox, 2015, p.162).

Now that each of Lawless and Fox's five recommendations have been outlined, how could existing conservative student organizations use them to improve their marketing of conservative ideas to young Americans?

The Five Recommendations, Applied

Each of Lawless and Fox's recommendations are designed to achieve one ultimate goal: to make more young Americans consider running for political office. This, however, is not the ultimate goal for any of three organizations discussed in this paper, although it is perhaps one secondary goal for one of them. The goal of Turning Point USA is to identify, educate, and train high school and college students to advocate for freedom, free market capitalism, and limited government. Young America's Foundation's purpose is similar, except the message that it hopes that students deliver is a message of freedom from government intrusion in their lives. The College Republican National Committee, on the other hand, seeks to instill a lifelong commitment to the Republican Party from college students, which includes grooming them to become the future leaders of the Republican Party. So, if Lawless and Fox's recommendations were to apply to any of these three organizations, they, in my view, would apply the most to the CRNC, since part of becoming a political party leader involves running for elected offices.

The first recommendation, creating a program that identifies potential future political leaders, is already being done to some extent by each of the three organizations. For Turning Point USA and Young America's Foundation, this is done by identifying students who hold conservative ideals and equipping them with the intellectual ammunition necessary to successfully advocate for the principles promoted by their organizations. These organizations are not necessarily grooming these students to become future political party leaders, but they are

equipping them to become political thought leaders on their respective campuses. For the College Republican National Committee, this recommendation is followed by identifying students who hold conservative ideals and engaging them in the requisite campaign activities necessary to run for political office. These activities familiarize students with the electoral process and give them the knowledge that is necessary to become a political party leader, which gives them the confidence needed to mount their own political campaign. So, for the most part, Lawless and Fox's first recommendation is already being done by all of these organizations.

The second and fifth recommendations, creating political video games and mobile apps that familiarize young people with running for and holding political office, are not being carried out by any of the organizations. Upon examination of Apple's App Store, none of the three organizations have mobile apps for the iPhone, so this is a possible area for development that these organizations could look into. None of the organizations have developed video games, either. In my view, creating a mobile app would be the more practical option, as these apps could give young people another way to familiarize themselves with these organizations and their goals. If someone wanted to start a chapter at their campus, they could use the app to get in touch with each of these organizations' headquarters to begin that process. They also could place mobile orders for products that could be distributed to students, such as posters, buttons, and stickers. The argument could be made that creating an app would be redundant, since students can do these things on the organizations' websites, but an app would create an additional pathway for students to engage with these organizations.

The third recommendation, making political engagement fundamental to the college experience, is another possible way for these organizations to increase young people's political motivation. This recommendation suggests that colleges, in some way, shape, or form, require

their incoming students to possess background knowledge in politics and current events. Young America's Foundation already does this to an extent by giving their campus chapters copies of the United States Constitution for distribution. These Constitutions provide students with a pocket course in civics. It would not be unreasonable, in my view, for Turning Point USA chapters to adopt a similar practice. Alternatively, these organizations could contact their elected officials by asking them to create and pass laws by requiring colleges and universities to mandate that their incoming students have a basic knowledge of government and politics. This is easier said than done, however, as that would require significant changes in the curricula and standards of both higher education institutions and many state education systems. That is why this is a suggestion, and not a demand. This suggestion, in my view, would most easily be met by the CRNC chapters, since this organization is based more in partisanship than in ideology.

Lawless and Fox's fourth recommendation, increasing political ambition among young women, is currently being addressed to a degree. Turning Point USA hosts an annual Young Women's Leadership Summit, in which young, conservative women between the ages of 15 and 27 "hear from some of the nation's most well-known conservative leaders and activists, receive first-class professional development and leadership training, and network with other attendees and organizations from all across the country" (<https://www.tpusa.com/ywls/>). Yet, while these young women receive leadership training at this conference, it is not implied that they are being equipped with the skills necessary to run for office. However, given that Turning Point USA is not a partisan organization, encouraging these young women to run for office on a particular party's ticket might contradict the organization's mission. Young America's Foundation and the CRNC do not host a similar type of event, so hosting one to encourage young women to consider becoming future conservative leaders might be a possible area of expansion.

In summary, these organizations, in their own individual ways, are following some of the recommendations that Lawless and Fox put forth in their study. All three of the organizations are engaged in identifying potential future conservative leaders, although the CRNC is also focused on identifying potential future Republican leaders. Some of the organizations are also engaged in developing leadership skills in young women and increasing the political and governmental knowledge of high school and college students. However, while all three of the organizations are active on social media platforms, none of them have developed any sort of mobile phone application or game that could be used for student outreach. So, if the quality of these organizations' marketing to students were based on Lawless and Fox's recommendations, the quality would be about average, since they meet some of the recommendations while not focusing on others.

Since these five recommendations are designed to motivate young people to run for office, it follows that, if these organizations followed all of them, then young people's political ambition may increase. But, if the point of these organizations is to convince young people that they should adopt conservative political beliefs, then adopting these recommendations may not be the right measure to take. Even though each of these organizations have been around for a while, more and more young people are choosing to become politically independent and voting like Democrats. Increasing political ambition and self-efficacy among young people is not a bad goal. However, if doing so only gives young people the ambition and self-efficacy to become independent, possess liberal beliefs, and vote like Democrats, then these conservative student organizations would be shooting themselves in the foot. Simply put, conservative student organizations might be putting the cart before the horse by encouraging students from a generation with dominantly liberal political beliefs, dominantly Democratic and independent

partisanship, and low interest in the political process to suddenly have changes of mind and adopt conservative beliefs. These organizations are already on step two before completing the first step, which is to increase young people's political motivation. If these organizations were to take a step back and address this problem first, then convincing young people to adopt conservative beliefs and become future Republican Party leaders might be more feasible. Until that happens, however, conservative student organizations may continue to struggle to win the hearts and minds of students on their campuses.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis of young people's attitudes toward government and politics, their ideological leanings and policy stances, current conservative student organizations, basic marketing concepts, the consumer decision-making model, and Lawless and Fox's recommendations, it is my conclusion that the current strategies of marketing conservative ideas, principles, and values to young people are in need of a shift in their focus. While encouraging students to adopt these organizations' ideas, principles, and values for themselves is important, it is, in my view, not the most important goal. The focus of the marketing strategies of conservative student organizations must shift from a strategy focused on principles to a strategy focused on creating a desire within young people to participate in the American political system. Even though organizations like Turning Point USA, the College Republican National Committee, and Young America's Foundation exist as outlets for young people to engage in political discussion, many young people remain indifferent toward the political process. Further complicating matters is the increased independence of young people from political partisanship and their greater

tendency to not only vote Democratic but to leave the Republican Party in favor of shedding partisan labels.

These findings strongly suggest that conservative student organizations have significant room for improvement in their efforts to reach out to young people. It is clear that, despite these organizations' efforts to encourage young Americans to adopt conservative ideas, principles, and values, many are choosing not to do so. Addressing young people's indifference to the political system is the first step these organizations must take in order for them to consider adopting those ideas, values, and principles. If these organizations can successfully pique young people's interest in becoming involved in the political system, then it might incline young people to adopt the ideas, values, and principles they stand for. This is what, I believe, must happen for conservative student organizations in order for them to remain relevant among the younger generations.

It will be up to the organizations currently advocating conservatism to young people to decide whether or not to make this change in focus. But it is, in my view, in the best interest of these organizations to do so. It is clear that, based on young Americans' (lack of) partisanship, voting tendencies, and indifference toward the political system, conservative organizations focused on reaching out to young people must change how they market their ideas, principles, and values. In order for these organizations to thrive in the future, they must shift their focus from one based on the adoption of principles to one based on encouraging young people to become politically involved. This is the new way forward for conservative student outreach.

References

- About Turning Point USA (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.tpusa.com/aboutus/>
- Anderson, K. S. (2017, December 13). Is Trump Driving Young Republicans Out of the Party?. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/opinion/alabama-republicans-trump.html>
- Campus Activism (2019). Retrieved from <https://students.yaf.org/campus-activism/>
- Definitions of Marketing (2013, July). Retrieved from <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing/>
- Diamant, J., & Alper, B. A. (2017, May 4). Though still conservative, young evangelicals are more liberal than their elders on some issues. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/04/though-still-conservative-young-evangelicals-are-more-liberal-than-their-elders-on-some-issues>
- History (2019). Retrieved from <http://www.crnc.org/about/history>
- History of Young America's Foundation (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.yaf.org/about/history/>
- Institute of Politics Spring 2018 Youth Poll (2018, June 18). Retrieved from <https://iop.harvard.edu/spring-2018-poll>
- Jennings, M. K., & Niemi, R. G. (1974). *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (pp. 39-62). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kiley, J., & Dimock, M. (2014, September 25). The GOP's Millennial problem runs deep. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/25/the-gops-millennial-problem-runs-deep/>
- Lawless, J. L., & Fox, R. L. (2015). *Running from Office: Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics* (pp. 4-163). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- November 2017 Toplines (2017, November). Retrieved from <http://genforwardsurvey.com/assets/uploads/2017/11/NBC-GenForward-November-2017-Toplines-Final.pdf>
- Our Mission (2019). Retrieved from <http://www.yaf.org/about/>
- Partisan Identification Is 'Sticky,' but About 10% Switched Parties Over the Past Year (2017, May 17). Retrieved from <https://www.people-press.org/2017/05/17/partisan-identification-is-sticky-but-about-10-switched-parties-over-the-past-year/>

- Principles of Marketing*. (2015). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing. Retrieved from <https://open.lib.umn.edu/principlesmarketing/>
- Schneider, G. S. (2017, November 24). Historic turnout of young voters in Virginia election poses problem for Republicans. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/historic-turnout-of-young-voters-in-virginia-election-hints-at-national-problem-for-republicans/2017/11/24/8e90d978-cf03-11e7-9d3a-bcbe2af58c3a_s
- The Generation Gap in American Politics (2018, March 1). Retrieved from <https://www.people-press.org/2018/03/01/the-generation-gap-in-american-politics>
- Turning Point USA-Identify. Empower. Organize (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.tpusa.com/>
- Twenge, J. M. (2017, August 22). Young Americans Are Actually Not Becoming More Progressive. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4909722/trump-millennials-igen-republicans-voters/>
- Two-Thirds of Youth Fearful About America's Future, Prefer Democratic Control of Congress, Harvard Youth Poll Finds (2017, December 5). Retrieved from <https://iop.harvard.edu/youth-poll/fall-2017-poll>
- Youth Turnout 26% in Virginia and 18% in New Jersey (2013, November 6). Retrieved from <https://civicyouth.org/youth-turnout-26-in-virginia-and-18-in-new-jersey/>